

HOWARD COUNTY - Congressman Steny Hoyer today released the Judith P. Hoyer Early Care & Education Enhancement Program Evaluation and discussed the results of the study at a press conference at the Cradlerock School Judy Center in Columbia, which included special guest State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick. Congressman Hoyer worked to establish "Judy Centers," early education centers for young children, which are named after his late wife and educator Judith P. Hoyer. There are currently 24 Judy Centers across the state of Maryland.

"It is an honor to be here today with Dr. Grasmick, and to tour my favorite place - a Judy Center," said Congressman Hoyer. "My wife Judy was a believer in the value of early childhood care and had a vision of a full service early childhood and family learning center - what are now known throughout the state as Judy Centers. These centers encourage collaboration among the entire community to provide the educational support, health care, adult education services, family literacy, and programs for infants and toddlers, and play a major role in the future health and well-being of our young people. Judy would be proud today. And I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Nancy Grasmick, a longtime friend and colleague. Without her vision and dedication, there would not be 24 Judy Centers today."

Congressman Hoyer made note of three critical findings from this evaluation, that Judy Centers increase access to high-quality programs and services for low-income and special needs children; that they improve school readiness and minimize any "achievement gap" at the start of first grade; and that they are high quality centers, ninety-two percent of all early care and education programs at the Judy Centers completed state or national program accreditation.

"Any teacher will tell you the difference it makes in the classroom to have students who come to school ready-to-learn," added Hoyer.

"We have made tremendous strides in developing high-quality, comprehensive programs for Maryland's youngest children," said State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick. "And, I consider the Judy Centers the prime mobilizer in this early education movement."

Last month, Congressman Hoyer introduced the Full Service Community Schools Act, a bill that builds on the success of the Judy Centers in Maryland. The Full Service Community Schools Act, will provide federal grants to local school districts and community-based organizations to integrate the educational, health, developmental and social programs at public elementary and secondary schools.

"This legislation will provide incentives for service providers at the local level to integrate their services, to coordinate, to work together, so to better serve our children and our families," added Hoyer. "I am pleased that Dr. Grasmick supports this initiative, and I look forward to working with her and my professional colleagues in this effort."

The report released at the press conference showed the importance impact successful early childhood education efforts have on preparing young children for kindergarten. School readiness efforts, such as these, help ensure that children enter school ready to learn and achieve.

The evaluation specifically stated that "quality early learning experiences contribute to the healthy development and future well-being of Maryland's children. Participation in a quality early care and education program has been shown to enhance cognitive development and socialization of children and improve performance on indicators of school readiness. Consequently, it is critical for states to ensure availability of quality programs that assist families in preparing children to be ready for school and subsequent lifetime opportunities.

"Collectively, Judy Centers have accomplished their goal to improve access to programs and services for children from birth through age five. The number of children ages birth through three enrolled in Judy Center programs increased by 25 percent, and the number of children enrolled in Kindergarten programs increased by 22 percent during the 2002-2003 school year," added the report.

Also attending today's event were Sandra Erickson, Chief of School Administration and Instruction, Howard County; Dr. John Cox, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Charles County Schools; Rosa Murillo, Parent with 3 children at the Cradlerock Judy Center; Susan Rosenbaum, Director of Citizen Services, Howard County; Courtney Watson, Howard County Board of Education; Charles Wainwright, Maryland State Child Care Association; Dominique Raymond, Maryland Higher Education Commission; and Judy Center Coordinators from Charles, Calvert, Prince George's and St. Mary's counties.

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